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**Nº 9.**

*The Jews during the Victorian Era."*

A SERMON  
PREACHED AT THE  
NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

ש"ק פ' שלח-לך

Sabbath June 26<sup>th</sup> 5657-1897.

BY THE

**Very Rev. Dr Adler,**  
CHIEF RABBI.

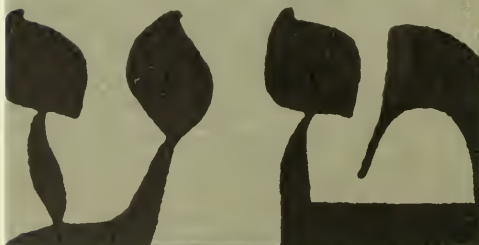
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# THE JEWS DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE  
NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

ON

שֵׁק פִּי שְׁלַח-לֶךְ

SABBATH, JUNE 26TH, 5657—1897.

BY THE

VERY REV. DR. ADLER, CHIEF RABBI.

LONDON:

ALFRED J. ISAACS & SONS,

16, CAMOMILE STREET, AND 19, BURY STREET, E.C.





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וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וַיִּזְכְּרֶתֶם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹת יְיָ  
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר  
אִתְּם זָגִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם: לִמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי  
וְהָיִיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם:

“And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eye, after which ye use to go astray. That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.”—NUMB. xv. 39, 40.

## THE JEWS DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA

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ON the Thanksgiving Day, celebrated in our Synagogues with much outward pomp, but, I hope, also with sincere inward devotion, the preachers dwelt primarily on the wondrous progress and expansion of the Empire during the reign of our beloved Queen—a reign rich in achievement and fruitful in promise beyond any other. It is meet that to-day I should ask you, my dear Brethren, at this great and memorable turning point in English history, to reflect with me on the position occupied by Anglo-Judaism during the Victorian Era, *the ideals we should pursue, and the perils we should avoid.*

There is no need for me to dwell at any length on the progress we have achieved during the present reign. The Jewish Press has published a series of articles, in which this theme has been ably and exhaustively handled. The contrast presented between our condition in the year when Her Majesty ascended the throne and our position at this Jubilee is indeed striking and suggestive.

In 1837 the Jews of the United Kingdom scarcely numbered more than 25,000, the great bulk of whom were Londoners, and the rest scattered in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bristol and a few other towns. There were then not more than six synagogues in London. Almost all the learned professions were closed to us. Even in trade and commerce many restrictions existed. No Jew could occupy a post of trust in the municipality or the state. How mighty a change has been effected! The number of Jews in the United Kingdom is probably not below 150,000. They no longer confine themselves to a single district, but have spread over the whole Metropolis, and wherever they settle they build a place of worship. The number of synagogues in the Metropolis is not less than fifty. In addition to these there are at least one hundred and twenty in the British Empire. I have myself, since the time that Rabbinical duties devolved upon me, consecrated as many as forty houses of prayer. There are but few of these places of worship which are without regular and systematic pulpit instruction. Every post of honour and responsibility has been entrusted to the English Jew. He is no longer regarded as an alien, but as an integral part of the nation, and as closely identified with its

interests as any other Englishman. He has achieved distinguished success in the various learned professions, in the senate, and at the Universities, in science, art, and literature. We have reason to pride ourselves on the efficient and zealous administration of our places of worship, our charities and schools. Our United Synagogue, our Board of Guardians, our Religious Education Board are organizations, which, while not free from human imperfections, reflect the highest credit on their founders and managers. An earnest desire is manifested to provide for every form of suffering and need. Thanks to the whole-hearted generosity of the Baroness Clara de Hirsch we shall soon possess in a salubrious part of the country a Convalescent Home for sufferers in the earlier stages of consumption. Within the present year the foundation stone of a new Home and Hospital for Incurables will be laid in South Tottenham, and of a Home for our Deaf and Dumb in Wandsworth. It is proposed to establish a Jewish Dispensary ; and if it will be administered on strictly provident lines the evils apprehended from such an institution will not be realized, and much good may be effected. I also earnestly trust that at last strenuous endeavours are being made, that the East End Scheme be no longer

allowed to remain a dream, a plan and project, but that our anxiety for the spiritual and moral welfare of our foreign poor will assume a practical and tangible shape.

But if we scan our internal status carefully and with an unbiassed eye, can we aver that there has been progress all along the line, and that there is nothing but cause for jubilation and glad complacency? It is true, we cannot sufficiently praise the self-sacrificing zeal with which a small band of workers throw themselves heart and soul into the administration of our institutions, cheerfully surrendering their scant hours of ease and leisure. All honour to that inner circle of philanthropists who never weary of giving and toiling in every good cause! But where there is so much to admire, is there not also much to deplore? Is not the number of workers and givers woefully out of proportion to the muster-roll of the community? What grand things could be achieved, if, when some good work has to be accomplished, there would be no need for canvassing, soliciting and persuading, if there would be no pleas, no evasions, no refusals, if each one would feel himself stirred to bring his offering for all manner of work which the Lord has commanded—offerings of time, of substance, and of loving and matured thought?

And if we examine our condition with a closer scrutiny, can it be asserted that there is no weakening in the tie that binds the Jew to his faith, that there prevails no religious declension, no inertness, no indifference? Are there not houses of prayer in which the attendance of worshippers on the Sabbath is woefully scanty? In some instances the abstention may be due to the synagogue members imagining that the Divine worship does not satisfy their spiritual cravings. But must it not be confessed, that in most cases this abstention is due to love of ease, and but too often to the mournful circumstance that the heaven-ordained Sabbath is no longer uniformly hallowed? The struggle for existence has become so fierce, and our resistance to temptation is so feeble and flaccid.

I have spoken of the Judaism of the synagogue. How is it with the Judaism of the home? How stands it with the observance of those precepts intended to preserve and maintain our religious identity? How fares the education of our children? It is well that religious classes have been established in connection with many of our synagogues. But do the children of all the members attend those classes? And even if they participate in the instruction, can they gain an

adequate knowledge of our prayers, our sacred language and the Bible, of the principles and duties of our faith within a few brief hours on the Sunday morning? And can the instruction, however intelligently imparted, exercise any abiding influence if it is not aided by parental example and influence—the indispensable teaching without words—in the home? What is the secret spring of this religious decadence, the existence of which cannot be gainsaid? Is it not the deplorable fact that there are too many in our midst who allow themselves to be entirely absorbed by low, selfish materialistic tendencies? Are there not those who talk of nothing, think of nothing, care for nothing, I might almost say pray for nothing, save money all day long, valuing it chief among all earthly goods, looking up to those who have won it as though they were gods, measuring the sole success of life by it, marrying their sons and their daughters with main reference to it? And why is it desired that the stream of gold should pour into their coffers? Not as a means of beneficence, not for the good it may accomplish, but because it will enable the possessor and those about him to live in luxury, to indulge their expensive tastes, to satisfy every caprice, and to gratify every folly? And thus it comes that their whole mental horizon is bounded



by the money-market and the card-table. Hence arises an entire lack of ideal aims, a deplorable absence of spiritual aspirations. I would not for a moment class these people with being bad and vicious. But their action is based on an altogether false view of life. I was conversing with a highly respectable man the other day, who told me that he was accustomed to spend his weekday evenings as a rule in playing cards. I asked him, "Do you think this the right way of spending all your time?" He answered, "We only live once." "Ah, my friend!" I replied, "just because we live only once, do you not think that you should make a worthier use of your leisure?"

I have read of a great living physician who was once attending the deathbed of a rich man, and it seemed as if he could not die, for, with aimless and nervous restlessness, his hands kept opening and shutting over the counterpane. "What is the matter?" the physician asked. "I know," the son answered; "every night, before he went to sleep, my father liked to feel and handle some of his banknotes." The son slipped a ten-pound note into the old man's hand, and—feeling, handling, and clutching it—he died. Ah, me! Is it not terrible that by their love of money men should deprive themselves of all that makes life worth the living,

health and happiness, should suffer their hearts to be filled with passionate hopes and fears, their characters and consciences to be sapped? With all earnestness and all affection I would exclaim to you

וְלֹא תִתְּנוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶּם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם זָנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם :

“Ye shall not seek after your own heart and your eyes, after which ye use to go astray.”

The Scriptural passage from which this text is taken is read twice in the קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע, in the Morning and the Evening Prayer. It is recited aloud by the Chief Rabbi for the time being, and there is ample justification for this practice, for we may regard this text as the gist and quintessence of the Torah, as containing, in a few pithy words, the great message which it was the mission of Israel to declare to the world. The voice that comes from within our heart and conscience is a most vivid and powerful reminder of God's Presence and Will. But it does not always sound with sufficient potency to make itself heard, and we, weak mortals that we are, are apt to forget and set at nought even the most momentous duties, unless we are reminded of them from time to time. The Divine Law has, therefore, instituted certain signs and mementos. And one of them is the צִיצִית—the fringes or tassels which

we place on the אֶרְבֶּעַ פִּנְיוֹת, and the Tallith. And our text teaches us, with an emphasis that cannot be mistaken, that the outward observance of the precept is of no value unless it exercises a great spiritual and absorbing moral influence. "And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own hearts and your own eyes, after which ye use to go astray."

There is one point on which the teachings of Scripture, of all history and philosophy are in accord, that man by his nature is inclined to evil. עֵינָא וּלְבָא תִּרִי סְרַסּוּרֵי עֲבָרָה "The eye and the heart are ever ready solicitors to sin." His heart whispers to man "Walk in the ways of thy imagination and in the sight of thine eyes. Do whatever thine own sweet will dictates. Acknowledge no master save thine own desire, no other rule but the gratification of every passion of the moment." It was to conquer this tendency, to correct this imperfection of our nature, to bridle our evil propensities, that God spake from Sinai, laying down the eternal basis of the moral law.

This one grand doctrine permeates the whole of Scripture from end to end. We pass from prophet to prophet under every difference of cir-

cumstance which a common soil and a common language left possible, and we are not sensible of any change of key. One deep monotone is heard throughout their music. The God of Israel is a God of holiness who demands righteousness and holiness on the part of His creatures as the only means of gaining His favour.

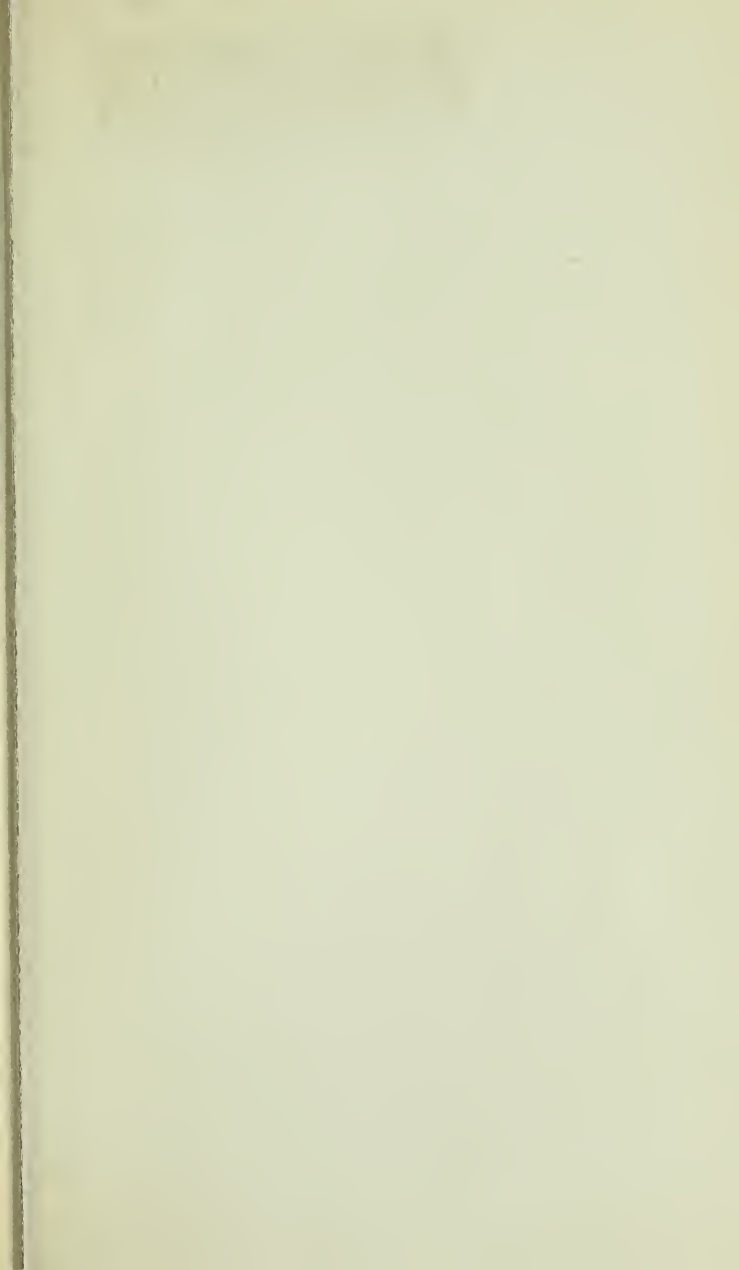
וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתָם לֹא נֹאמַר אֱלֹהִים אֲתָנוּ :

In every ordinance we fulfil we must recognise and look upon Him who is our Ideal of Goodness and Mercy and Truth, and seek to mould our little lives by His example, in His image. We must not make the acquisition of wealth nor the pursuit of pleasure the end-all and the be-all of life, but strive for high aims. We must find our delight in knowing and in keeping the Law of God. And this same consideration must govern us in the training of our children. Their material success must no longer be our paramount consideration. We must induce them to devote their lives to the service of the community, to that service which pious Hannah viewed as the greatest privilege—the ministering before the Lord. We must stimulate them to devote themselves to professions, to science, to productive industry, to art and literature, to work which requires the power of patient

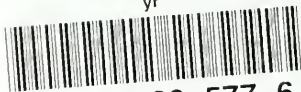
research. We must account it a higher honour if a member of our faith has loyally and faithfully served his community and his country, if he has made the slightest addition to the sum total of human knowledge, if he has won distinction in a seat of learning, than if he had piled up untold millions. Yes, my brethren, I appeal to you all, young and old. "Do not seek after your eyes, and your hearts after which ye use to go astray." Prove yourselves servants of God, not slaves of Mammon, faithful observers of the dictates of our religion, not mere keen competitors in business with a congenital knack, as has been said, of getting the best of a bargain. Prove that you have not abandoned that devotion to spiritual aims and ends which once has been, and should for ever prove the undying privilege, the highest glory and the purest joy of every true Israelite, so that you may be enabled to look forward to the future of Anglo-Judaism without fear and misgiving.

My dear congregants, You will agree that it would be unbecoming for me to bring my discourse to a close, without consecrating some words of appreciation to the memory of an Anglo-Jewish worthy, who has just passed away. We gratefully acknowledge that the late Sir John

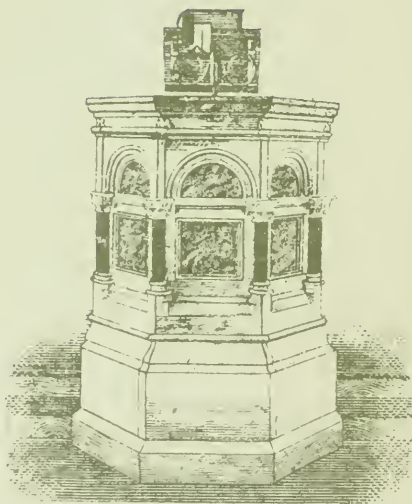
Simon did not seek after his own heart and his own eyes, after which too many in our midst allow themselves to go astray. He was ever actuated by high ideal aims, and endowed with a lofty scorn for all that savoured of mean and sordid materialism. Fired, as he was, with a devoted love for his race, he was unwearied in the House of Commons in lifting up his eloquent voice on behalf of our oppressed brethren. It was mainly due to his initiative and organization, aided by one very dear to him, that those memorable meetings were held at the Mansion House and in the Guildhall, at which the voice of England pleaded with no uncertain sound on behalf of the Jews of Roumania and Russia. And when, nine years ago, failing health compelled him to retire from Parliament, he addressed those touching words to the Anglo-Jewish Association, "My heart, as you know, has always been in the cause of our people, and it is a matter of deep regret to me that I shall no longer be able to advocate it in the House of Commons." May his bright example be a spur and an incentive to us all! May his righteousness go before him, and his memory abide as a blessing! Amen.



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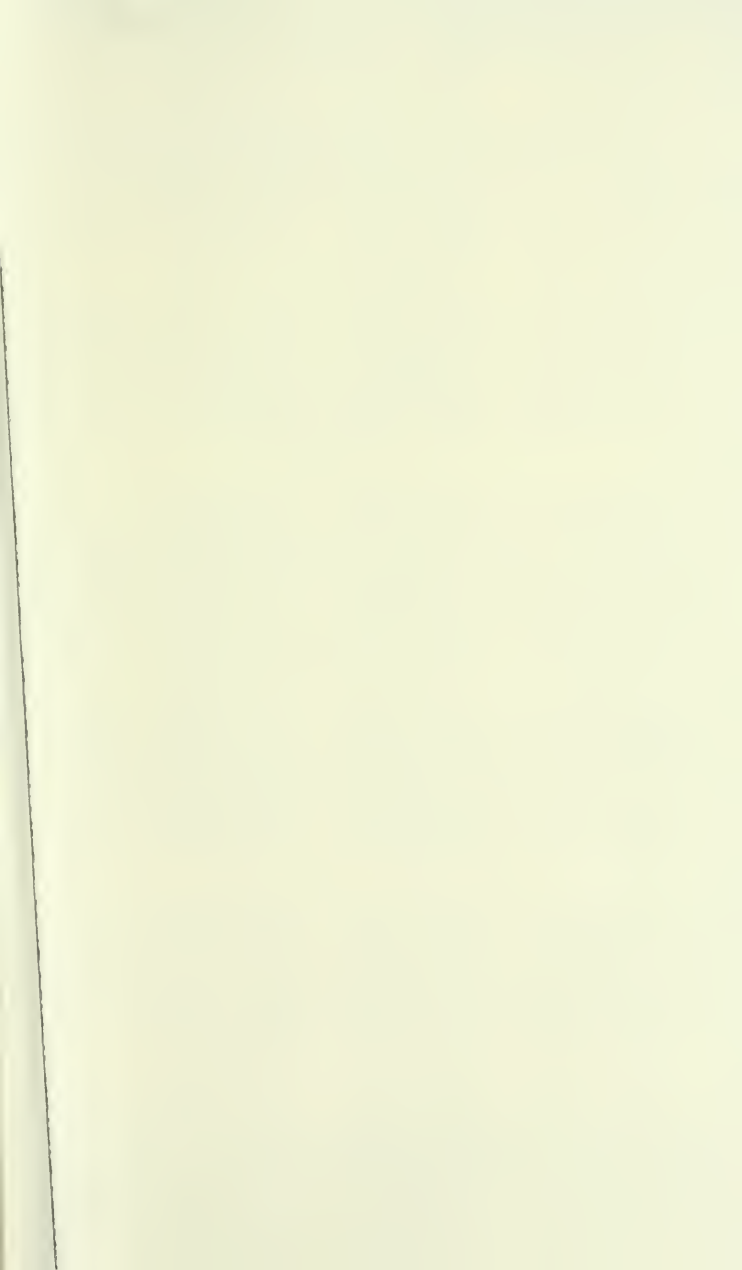


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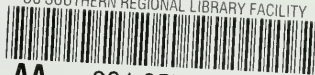
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